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The author, a nationally known civil rights leader, declares that while racial integration must be the ultimate objective in a multiracial society, current urban demographic realities preclude the possibility of large scale desegregation. School decentralization and community control are seen as necessary, forerunners and ultimate partners for achieving true integration. (NH)

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Nationally known civil rights leader, James Farmer, formerly director of CORE and currently an Adjunct Professor at New York University, predicts that the "terrible" responsibilities and problems of school officials "will grow more complex rather than simpler." Despite the efforts that were made during the decade after 1954 by black leaders to push for real integration of the nation's schools, there has been only token integration in the south, and in northern cities schools have been becoming more and more segregated. Mr. Farmer adds that more black Americans are sensing the immediate need to develop pride, self-esteem and self-awareness; in Mr. Farmer's words, the "need to develop an identity, a sense of cohesiveness." Mr. Farmer declares that while integration is a value which must be cherished as the ultimate objective in a multi-racial society, current demographic realities in the cities preclude the possibility of large scale desegregation. Mr. Farmer envisions decentralization and community control as a necessary forerunner and the ultimate partner to true integration.

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SOME VIEWS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DECENTRALIZATION AND RACIAL INTEGRATION IN LARGE CITY SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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The story is told about Gertrude Stein that as she lay on her deathbed a friend walked in and said, "Gertrude, Gertrude, what is the answer?" She opened her eyes briefly and said, "What's the question?" and then died.

Today, even the questions we ask are changing--and answers that appeared to be absolutely clear, accurate and precise at one time now seem obsolete and archaic. I had a call from an old friend of mine not too long ago. I had not seen him for many years, and as he spoke it was obvious that he was utterly dumbfounded. "Jim," he said, "I'm baffled and puzzled. I don't know whether I'm coming or going. I'm catching it from left and right." "What's the problem?" I asked him. He said, "A few years ago, you so-called civil-rights leaders told me that the militant, progressive and important thing to do was to integrate a lily-white suburb. So my wife and I took you at your word. We took

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the bull by the horns and we moved out to Lovely Lane, next door to Gorgeous Garden; we bought a split-level house and mowed the lawn. And we faced all the garbage, and rocks through the window, and the burning crosses, and the isolation. Now--we have overcome. We are invited by our neighbors for cocktails, and we have them over for tea. But now we are called 'Uncle Toms' for living out there with all those white folks."

Shortly after this incident, I had the privilege of being in one of the large cities, participating in or leading a series of seminars sponsored by the Board of Education of that city. In the course of the conversation, several officials informed me that the Board would very shortly propose a total desegregation plan that would eliminate de facto segregation in one fell swoop. Lapsing into silence, I recalled that ten or twelve years ago, when we were battling in that city for school desegregation, the Board of Education would not acknowledge that it had any segregation. The Board's position was, "Surely this must be a case of mistaken identity. You must be talking about Mississippi, and this is not Mississippi. We have no segregation here." A few years later the Board acknowledged that there was segregation in the city, but said, "Ours is different because it's de facto and not de jure, and therefore it is both outside our field of competence and beyond our jurisdiction. After all," maintained the Board, "we are not the Housing Authority, we are the Education

Authority." Shortly thereafter, the Board acknowledged that it was its responsibility to confront and alleviate segregation. The Board was not sure what to do. Now, I was informed, the Board had a total plan, which would eliminate the problem. Regrettably for the unquestionably well-intentioned Board members, they must realize that--even if the plan is all that it is supposed to be--they must be prepared for the fact that when they announce it it will meet a lukewarm reception from a large segment of the black community; and from the smaller segments of that community it will meet outright hostility. They would be kidding themselves if they did not confront that fact--because the agenda and the priorities for many have changed.

Why have they changed? Without doubt they have changed because of our failures of the past--and by "our" I mean all of us, black and white--our failure to achieve desegregation. And we have failed. The fact of the matter is that residential segregation all over the land is increasing, not decreasing. Increasingly in our large cities there is the pattern of the black core and the white noose--as the inner city becomes more and more black, and the surrounding ring of suburbs becomes whiter and tighter. Along with this development comes, of course, increasing de facto school segregation. Some of the Southern cities I've observed are now, in fact, seeking to move from de jure to de facto segregation. I have watched several that are using urban renewal to uproot those areas which traditionally have been

racially integrated. Housing is built, and individuals and families are moved so as to create segregation. If that pattern is followed then before too long these Southerners will be able to say, as their northern brothers have already said, "Why, we're not defying any Supreme Court decision. Anybody who lives in this school district is perfectly free to go to the schools. It just so happens--accidentally--they are all white, and these people are all black."

So we find that--while our focus has been aimed at abolishing segregation--segregation, in fact, has been increasing. We have also been failing economically, because the gap between the average income of black Americans and white Americans has been widening, not narrowing. What we have succeeded in doing in the past few years of our feverish activity, when many of our heads were broken, and many of us knew the insides of countless jails, is to improve the upward mobility of those black persons who have achieved some education and who have a little money. But the same is not true, statistics show, of the black high-school graduates. Among black high-school graduates unemployment now is nearly as high as unemployment among black high-school dropouts. Still, for black college graduates, it is easy to get a job. Business and government agencies are seeking them. At the end of the year at Lincoln University, for example, a large number of companies had representatives on campus looking for the services of these educated, trained, personable young black men and women. Some of us naturally suspected

that the motives of the companies were not wholly above suspicion: big business is concerned with its public image. A friend of mine called and said, "Jim, I've just been hired by a big corporation at a fine salary and guess what? I don't have to do anything but sit near the door and look like a Negro." Later he was fired because he wasn't dark enough--the company wanted someone with greater visibility. My point is that while we have improved the mobility of the middle class who have the tools--those without the tools, without the skills, without the education, without the money, have slipped back; and the gap has widened. Unquestionably the poor are becoming poorer while the rest of society gains in affluence. This fact has rudely interrupted our dreams in recent years and many of us have been kept awake nights pondering the problem, indeed the fear, that while we have opened the doors very slightly to equal opportunity, nevertheless the masses of black Americans may very well be precisely where they were before those victories were won.

It is also becoming quite apparent in the black communities that the economic discrepancy has a correlate in education. With respect to most black children, the educational establishment has utterly failed. We must confront the fact that the schools have not educated the poor black children. Consider the Harlems and the Bedford-Stuyvesants and the Watts's. The figures and statistics are well-known, but it bears repeated emphasis that not

infrequently students coming out of high-school read at a third and fourth-grade level. In my own community of Bedford-Stuyvesant, figures show that only one-third of those entering high school graduate. Of the one-third that do graduate, 87% receive the so-called "general diploma" which prepares them literally for nothing; as opposed to the academic diplomas preparing for college, the commercial diplomas preparing for office work, or technical diplomas for vocational or technical jobs. A kid says, "I'm going to make it now, I've got the piece of paper, I didn't drop out like that fool over there did. Now watch my smoke!" And he finds that the piece of paper is meaningless. A cruel hoax has been played on him. All of the failures of the schools have become abundantly clear to the parents and the black community at large; and that is why the focus is on the educational issue in the black community. Probably more stress is laid on this issue than on any other. I hesitate to say that there is one issue, or one problem, which should have top priority, and that all the others are secondary or tertiary or what have you--because they are all very much interrelated. Unless we work on all of them simultaneously, as Kenneth Clark points out, the work that we do on any one is probably going to fail. But if there is one that is more fundamental than the others, cutting across all of the areas, it is education; and this, then, is where the focus has to be.

In the past, the educational thrust of the civil

rights movement has been exclusively on dispersing black children into white schools and white communities. In the late fifties practically no black leaders would have dared to speak of improving the school facilities within the ghetto communities themselves, because such a position would have been seen as tantamount to advocating continued segregation. It was rather confidently felt that segregation would prove short-lived and soon all of the blacks would be dispersed, roughly in a one to ten ratio; so that you would perhaps have to have a countdown in reverse to find one of us--you know, 6,7,8,9, ah, there you are, the tenth man. To demonstrate how many of us, including myself, held the dispersionist view almost singlemindedly, let me recount briefly a personal experience. I visited university and college campuses in the late fifties, and very generally some white students would come to me and say, "Mr. Farmer, we don't understand the Negro students." "Why not?" "They seem clannish, they stick together. Two of them come to the dining hall together for dinner, and they sit together." And I would ask, "What would you expect?" And the answer was, "One should sit over there, and one over there, so they would be fully integrated." Obviously that would be an absurdity. Since the two had something in common, they had experiences in common, they could discuss interests in common and so forth, they sat together. Still, we held that kind of dispersionist view then. However, as I tried to emphasize earlier, there has not been dispersion but

increased segregation.

Why, then, did we exclusively seek integration or dispersal? There are several reasons. The first, which was most valid and which is still valid, I would like to underscore. That is that there is an educational value in integrated education. There is an educational value in black children and white children from all ethnic backgrounds, from all kinds of previous experiences, learning to get along with each other and to study with one another. That is as valid now as it ever was. There was a second reason, too, which was somewhat degrading of the black man. This was the feeling on the part of some that black people could not learn if they were alone, that they had to be with whites to learn. Well, now I would reject that view. I think it is possible for black kids to learn with only blacks, just as white kids in the suburbs manage to learn in the company of their all-white classmates. Unquestionably in a racially homogenous school or classroom the social experiences of the children are not as rich as they could or should be. But the point is that there is no reason why black children cannot learn when surrounded only by their fellow blacks. Finally, the third reason was purely tactical or political. This was the assumption that if we said our schools were bad, that they were inadequate, that we had the least experienced teachers, the poorest facilities, and the most overcrowded classrooms, and if we could get our youngsters into the white schools, then we would

take advantage of white power to insure good education for our children. In other words, the assumption was that the white middle class parents were going to see to it that their children had first-class schools. They would use their political power, they would call city hall, they would call the superintendent, they would call the state house, and they would see that they had the best education possible and we blacks then could ride on the swell of the white tidal wave. This assumption has not proved correct. It has not worked because many of the white parents have left the city and we have had increased segregation. They have gone out to the suburbs where they were away from us and thus we did not reap the advantages of their political power.

I want to make it quite clear, however, that I still maintain that integration is a value which we must cherish as an objective--as an ultimate objective. I want to state, just as strongly, my view that it is important that black Americans now develop a sense of cohesiveness and develop a pride. These two things are not contradictory, because America has not been really a "melting-pot" in the common sense of the word, where all people have become one. What it has been is--if I may use another cliché--cultural pluralism, a pluralistic culture where people can acknowledge, respect and honor their heritage and their background, their history; and at the same time learn to respect the history, background and heritage of others.

Thus, what I advocate is this: I would seek to

achieve as much desegration as is possible; remembering, however, that in our big cities now, considering the ethnic population and the population shifts, it will not be possible to have total desegregation. Look at Washington, D.C., where 93 percent of the school population is black. There are no whites with whom to integrate unless we can import them. So I say that we dare not, we dare not now neglect the education--and thus the futures--of our children who in the foreseeable future will be going to school in the hearts of those black ghettoes. Indeed, we need to place a special effort there.

This kind of reasoning forms the basis for the current demands by the black community for community participation in school affairs and indeed a large measure of community control. Such reasoning is in fact at the heart of the school decentralization movement. I must confess, however, that I do not view community control or decentralization as essentially an educational matter. I view it as fundamentally a social matter, and a social thrust. It is the desire of masses of people to participate in decision-making. Its importance lies in that it changes our democracy from an elitist democracy to a populist democracy, whereby people who in the past have been excluded from the decision-making process can be included. But, very frankly, community control does not ipso facto mean higher quality education. It may remain the same, it may be better, it may be worse. There is no guarantee that it will be any

one of these three; it depends on what we do with community control. I think, therefore, it is a valid social thrust; but not fundamentally an educational thrust.

But the social dimensions of decentralization, strong as they are, do not provide its only rationale. The black parents who are pressing for local control of the schools do have one very potent strength, and that is a passionate concern for the future of their children. Somehow the boards of education and the professional educators must utilize that passion and that concern, because the greatest interest in the black community now is the quality of the children's education. Some polls support my point of view. A recent public opinion poll, conducted by a Bedford-Stuyvesant restoration corporation in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area in Brooklyn, showed that on the school issue the major concern was "the highest quality education possible for our kids because we want our kids to stand on our shoulders, so to speak; to have a better chance at life than we." To be sure, there are activists on one side who feel that the way to accomplish this end is through integration. There are others who feel that the way to do it is through building up the cohesiveness of the black school. But these are the activists. The masses are concerned chiefly with the quality of education which their children receive.

I believe that both of the tactics of the activists are right, and that there is a pendulum swinging. First the pendulum swung exclusively to dispersion or integration.

Now among many of my colleagues it swings exclusively toward cohesion, or, if you prefer, a neo-separation. I think that the swing of the pendulum will narrow and if it comes to rest it will come to rest between the two.

I would like to emphasize again the necessity of the black American to develop his pride and identity. I observed one school up in Syracuse where efforts toward this end are meeting considerable success. It's Croton-on-Campus, where Syracuse University is working with the Board of Education. A school was selected which was de facto segregated, 90 to 95 percent black. A park and a building were erected for it on the Syracuse campus, using all of the laboratory and other facilities of the University. Teachers volunteered to come to the school and to make a special effort to improve the self-image of the black students. A measurable improvement in their self-image has been noted; and this should be regarded as a very necessary achievement. Imagine a black child who has been taught that he is inferior; that his skin is a kind of deformity; that his kinky hair is "bad" and straight hair is "good"; that what he is is bad and what others are is good and something which he should seek. It is this kind of programming which must be overcome if our black children are to develop racial pride and identity. It is this racial programming that the Kerner Commission Report was talking about. It is not saying that all of us are bigots. It is saying that we have all been in a way programmed to perpetuate the racism in our culture. Thus,

the issue goes beyond that of individual racism, and I believe that we would be well advised, all of us, to examine our institutions and see how they can be used as change agents to help remove racism from American culture.

One of the fundamental institutions to be examined is the schools. Traditionally we have demanded that the schools perpetuate our "American values" as part of their educative function. One of these, whether we care to admit it or not, has been the concept of inferiority and superiority of races, particularly that black people are inferior. I do not suggest that an individual superintendent or principal or teacher himself may be prejudiced, but the system has often, in subtle ways, built prejudice in. For example, one of the questions asked in some standardized tests which I know are used in various cities has three pictures: a picture of a man in a tuxedo, a picture of a man in work clothes, a picture of a man in a business suit; and the question asked is: Which of these pictures shows a father going to work? Now, obviously there is a built-in cultural bias; and the poor black youngster in the ghetto, who perhaps has never seen his father in a business suit except Sunday when he puts on his go-to-meeting clothes, would give the wrong answer. The child whose parent is a waiter or even a musician going to work in the uniform of his trade would also give the wrong answer; for obviously the correct answer is the man in the business suit. Here is the built-in cultural bias. With that and similar

questions, the child finds himself trapped in a lower track, and he comes out of school like the 87% in Bedford-Stuyvesant with a general diploma, when in large measure it has been the built-in cultural bias which has doomed him there. Perhaps worse still is the blow to his racial pride that such cultural biases always, if only implicitly, contain.

Our major institutions, including the schools, have been guilty of perpetuating such racist programming--inadvertently perhaps. (I am not one who holds to the conspiracy theory of history, or to the bad-man theory.) But in spite of all the good will in the world on the part of individuals, the system has built the black man in as the low man on the totem pole. Now we must try to make those institutions agents of change for society. We must see that the educational institutions reverse this racism and allow black people to develop pride and to say, indeed, black <u>is</u> beautiful. That does not mean that what is not black is ugly. That message must be gotten across, too. It is not necessary to hate someone else in order to love oneself. Indeed, I assert that if one does love himself, as a person and as a group member, then he does not need to hate anyone else; for he is secure in himself and in what he is. It is insecurity that forces him to hate.

Thus I see decentralization and community control as really being a forerunner to integration; and, in a larger sense, a partner to integration. There really is no contradiction, no paradox in this statement. Control of the

schools, an exercise in populist democracy, is essential for developing the self-image and self-respect of the black community. Only after the full flowering of the black self-image, and after the elimination of cultural biases from all our institutions, especially the schools, can there be complete integration. I see the Black-American as integrated as we can make him today, developing his pride, his self-esteem, his self-awareness. He must become a hyphenated American like the other Americans; like the Irish-Americans who, when they faced Jim Crow in signs in windows (Man Wanted: No Irish Need Apply), sang songs which said "It's an honor to be born an Irishman." For the Irish it was absolutely necessary, when told it was a dishonor to be Irish, to maintain their self-respect by saying it was an honor. Likewise the Black-American needs to sing <u>his</u> songs. He needs to develop <u>his</u> hyphen today. Yet he must not lose sight of the losing of the hyphen and becoming an American. It will be more difficult for him than it has been for the others because of his high visibility. Others, who in their first or second generation looked like the people outside their ghettoes, their slums, could easily be assimilated into the outside society, merge with it, and be absorbed; but it is not easy for the Black-American because you can always see him. And it doesn't help him to change his name. He's still there. Nevertheless, it is still possible--more difficult, but possible--for him to become a <u>real</u> member of our society. We must not lose the

the ultimate objective, the ideal, of his becoming a full-fledged American citizen. His destiny is here in this country; and we must now, as always, work toward the ultimate goal of one society and one nation, and toward healing the split and uniting our divided society.

We must not lose sight of that. But at the same time we must live in the here and now. I know it is not an easy matter for the nation to be made color-blind. It is not now color-blind--it must somehow <u>become</u> color-blind. But the becoming is a very difficult and a complex process.

Educational administrators, probably more than the professional civil-rights workers at the present time, have considerable responsibility and power in this regard. Educators have the power to prepare young black people to enter the mainstream of the nation's life; to honor themselves and at the same time to honor men's interdependence; to develop cohesiveness and at the same time to build bridges.

Terry Francois of the N.A.A.C.P. in San Francisco made a suggestion which I think deserves considerable exploration. In discussing educational parks and other such complexes, he suggested that when we have these we ought to have released time for different ethnic groups to study their own history--not closing the door to others, but letting others in, if they desire, to learn about that history. It is just as important for white Americans to learn about Black-Americans' history, and about Africa, as it is for Black-Americans to learn about it. And if the

Black-American wishes to go into the released time class for Mexican-Americans to learn their history--or German-Americans, or Italian-Americans, or Polish-Americans--then why not let him do it? Perhaps in that way we can help to learn the lesson that we all, black and white, must grasp: that we are all Americans, we are all humans, and that is more important than blackness or whiteness.

Humanity does transcend color. But remember--one cannot really love humanity unless he also loves himself. If he rejects and hates himself, then it is not possible for him to love mankind of which he is a part. But the other side of the coin is also true--it's really not possible for him to love himself unless he also at the same time learns to love humanity of which he is a part.

2,000 years ago, Hillel said, "If I am not for myself who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?"